

THE KILLING SEASON: A History of the Indonesian Massacres, 1965-1966. Geoffrey B. Robinson. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018. xx, 426 pp. (halftones.) US\$35.00, cloth. ISBN 9780691161389.

The Killing Season is a hard good book. Geoffrey Robinson provides an engagingly written and exhaustively researched account of one of the twentieth century's most horrific events. It is a social and political history of a mass killing that aims to explain how violence at such scale and ferocity could have happened, to uncover who was involved and why, and to detail the consequences for Indonesian politics and society today. It makes original contributions to the study of the killings that will make it a touchstone in the academic literature on modern Indonesian history. More than that, however, it is also the rare book that you can equally imagine assigning to an undergraduate class in Southeast Asian politics, giving as a gift to an avid reader, or insisting that a State Department employee read.

There are several questions that have long animated scholarship and broader discussion of the Indonesian killings. How did the killings come to reach the scale that they did? Who was responsible for them? What role did foreign powers play? Summarizing Robinson's answers—the army played a central role organizing, supporting, and participating in the violence; and foreign powers did support the killings—risks making them sound blasé or facile. But Robinson's research is careful and exhaustive, and his analysis is measured. He dismisses some of the more hysterical and conspiratorial interpretations of the violence and its causes, leaving the reader with the difficult conclusion that the very institution tasked with maintaining order and security was directly responsible for violence reaching the scale that it did. And Western powers did not just cheer from the sidelines, they played an active role in supporting the killings.

What makes the Robinson's conclusions about the army's role in the killings so convincing is that they explain not just violence, but also its timing and absence. When it took

time for the army to gain advantage over civilian authorities, as in Bali, killings were delayed. Where Army commanders elected not to oversee mass killings, as in West Java, mass killings did not happen at all. Robinson further establishes convincingly that the organization of the anti-PKI campaign, and the ideological campaign that surrounded the violence and followed it for decades, both bear the unmistakable mark of the Indonesian armed forces. No other institution could have organized violence at this scale, and its specific organization matches what one would expect from the Indonesian military of the mid-1960s.

Another strength of the book is Robinson's careful treatment of foreign involvement in the killings, in the chapter entitled "Cold War." The United States and other allied powers expressed both desire and intent to influence events in Indonesia, and dedicated resources to accomplish that task. It is almost certain that these efforts resulted in provocation and misinformation in Jakarta that served the purposes of sharpening the conflict between communist and anti-communist forces. That the U.S. and other anti-communist states were pleased at the elimination of the Communist Party of Indonesia and indifferent to the accompanying bloodshed has never been a secret, but we now know more about the specific role that these powers played in supporting the violence. At the beginning, the basic idea was to inform the Army that Western powers would not object or interfere in any way in what were indirectly described as "Indonesian affairs." But their role also grew to include a deliberate effort by the U.S. and the U.K. to "blacken the PKI" through propaganda and "psywar" and small amounts of highly targeted aid delivered to the Army.

Robinson's treatment of foreign complicity and responsibility for the killings is measured and careful, and ultimately damning. His linking of the release of the detainees to international pressure is rather more credulous of the role of international pressure from organizations such as

Amnesty International in forcing the Indonesian government's hand. I tread carefully here, noting Robinson's own role in these politics (see pp. 244-245). Nevertheless, it strikes me as more likely that much in the same way that Robinson has established that the killings were inextricably linked to the Army, the ultimate release of the prisoners must have also depended on domestic conditions as well. Further research on internal military and Golkar politics in the late 1970s to early 1990s—once in vogue for Indonesia-watchers—might prove clarifying in detailing how foreign pressure interacted with domestic political dynamics.

The audience for this book ought to be a broad one, given how important and underappreciated the subject matter is. *The Killing Season* is accessible enough to provide the introduction to the Indonesian killings that a non-expert requires, but it also is an indispensable resource with a compelling argument that should interest any serious Indonesianist or scholar of mass violence and its legacies. This is the book that should have been written long ago about the killings, but fortunately, now it has been.

Cornell University, Ithaca, NY

THOMAS B. PEPINSKY